AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) An absorbent core comprising:

(1) an acquisition layer;

(2) a storage layer having absorbent capacity, disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the acquisition layer, and

(3) a physically independent wicking layer disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the storage layer, comprising compressible hardwood pulp and having a density of between about 0.05 and about 0.4 g/cc, where the ratio of the vertical wicking height of the wicking layer to the vertical wicking height of the storage layer is equal to or greater than 1.25.

2. (Original) The absorbent core of claim 1, wherein the ratio of vertical wicking height of the wicking layer to the vertical wicking height of the storage layer is equal to or greater than 3.0.

3. (Original) The absorbent core of one of claims 1, wherein the compressible hardwood pulp is selected from the group consisting of eucalyptus, birch, aspen, maple, cotton wood, willow, oak, beech, poplar, basswood and combinations thereof.

4. (Original) The absorbent core of claim 3, wherein the compressible hardwood pulp is eucalyptus.

5. (Original) The absorbent core of one of claims 1, wherein the wicking layer further comprises softwood fibers.

6. (Original) The absorbent core of one of claims 1, wherein the wicking layer is imprinted with a compression pattern.

7. (Original) The absorbent core of one of claims 1, wherein the core has a rewet value of about 3.0 g or less.

8. (Original) The absorbent core of claim 7, wherein the core has a rewet value of about 2.0 g or less.

9. (Original) The absorbent core of claim 8, wherein the core has a rewet value of about 1.0 g or less.

10. (Original) The absorbent core of one of claims 1, wherein the wicking layer has a density of between 0.1 and 0.3 g/cc.

11. (Original) The absorbent core of one of claims 1, wherein the absorbent core is a unitary absorbent core produced in a series of unit operations in a continuous process.

12. (Currently amended) An absorbent article comprising:

(A) a liquid permeable top sheet,

(B) a liquid impermeable back sheet, and

(C) an absorbent core disposed between the topsheet and the backsheet, comprising:

(1) an acquisition layer disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the topsheet;

(2) a storage layer having absorbent capacity disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the acquisition layer, and

(3) a physically independent wicking layer disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the storage layer, comprising compressible hardwood pulp and having a density of between 0.05 and 0.4 g/cc, where the ratio of the vertical wicking height of the wicking layer to the vertical wicking height of the storage layer is equal to or greater than 1.25.

13. (Original) The article of claim 12, wherein the article is selected from the group consisting of infant diapers, training pants, adult incontinence briefs, feminine hygiene pads, surgical drapes and wound dressings.

14. - 28. Cancelled.

29. (Currently amended) An absorbent core comprising:

(1) an acquisition layer;

(2) a storage layer having absorbent capacity disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the acquisition layer; and

(3) a physically independent wicking layer disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the storage layer, comprising compressible hardwood pulp.

30. (Original) The absorbent core of claim 29, wherein the wicking layer comprises from about 50 percent by weight to about 99.9 percent by weight of hardwood fibers and from about 0.1 percent by weight to about 50 percent by weight synthetic fibers, the storage layer includes materials selected from the group consisting of synthetic fibers, chemically treated cellulosic fibers, wood pulp, superabsorbents and combinations thereof, and has a density of between 0.05 and 0.25 g/cc, and the acquisition layer includes materials selected from the group consisting of cross-linked cellulose fibers, synthetic fibers, and combinations thereof, and has a density of between 0.04 to 0.1 g/cc.

31. - 34. Cancelled.

35. (Currently amended) An absorbent core comprising:

(1) an acquisition layer;

(2) a storage layer having absorbent capacity disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the acquisition layer; and

(3) a web imprinted physically independent wicking layer disposed beneath and in fluid communication with the storage layer, comprising compressible wood pulp in which there is a pattern of densified regions and less densified regions.

36. (Original) The absorbent core of claim 31, wherein the wicking layer comprises from about 50 percent by weight to about 99.9 percent by weight of wood fibers and from about 0.1 percent by weight to about 50 percent by weight synthetic fibers, the storage layer includes materials selected from the group consisting of synthetic fibers, chemically treated cellulosic fibers, wood pulp, superabsorbents, and combinations t hereof, and has a density between 0.05 and 0.25 g/cc, and the acquisition layer includes material selected from the group consisting of crossslinked cellulose fibers, synthetic fibers, and combinations thereof and has a density of between 0.04 and 0.1 g/cc.

37. - 42. Cancelled.